

Journalists and the CIA

MEMO TO: Stansfield Turner, CIA Director
SUBJECT: Use of journalists by CIA

You told the American Society of Newspaper Editors the other day that you not only had approved the use of journalists for intelligence operations on three occasions, but that you saw nothing wrong with that.

You expressed some surprise that editors and other news professionals should be upset, and said, "I don't understand why you think if you accept an assignment from me that you are no longer free."

Let us tell you why. One thing that sets the American press apart from many of its counterparts elsewhere is that it is free, not only from government control, as prescribed by the Constitution, but also from government influence.

The latter is even more sinister than the former, and it is because the press in so many nations does work closely with the government in power that American news people are so often suspect when they go abroad.

You correctly said it would be "naive" to think foreign governments regard U.S. journalists as being above reproach. But that hardly means you should confirm those governments' worst fears by revealing that the

CIA does indeed ask journalists to spy for it on occasion.

You seemed to think this was old news, but for many of us, it struck like a bolt of lightning. We don't doubt that you had indeed promulgated the rule that journalists abroad could be used, with your consent, back in 1977. But we missed it, somehow, or we would have been sending this memo earlier.

More is at stake, you see, than the "honor" of the journalism profession, or the proper relationship of a free press with the government. You spoke, earlier in your remarks, of people such as former CIA agent Philip Agee "putting American lives in jeopardy" by disclosing agency secrets.

We're afraid you have done the same thing, Sir, by telling every foreign government in the world that any American journalist in any country could be in the service of the CIA. All that was necessary to raise the question was for you to admit that it was possible.

Think about it, and whether those are the kinds of doubts you want to raise. We doubt that they are, in which case you should rescind this unwise rule, and let a free press function as it should, unencumbered by suspicions of being merely a front for secret missions.